

Daley's 'House Black' Bolts Over Police Acts

By Joel Weisman
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CHICAGO—It took a while to turn Chicago Rep. Ralph H. Metcalfe around, but two incidents that hit close to home finished the process:

Dr. Herbert Odom was on his way home from a meeting to discuss the shortage of hospital facilities in South Side Chicago when he was stopped by two policemen for failing to have a light over his license plate.

The policemen, both white, pushed the black dentist up against his late model car and attempted to frisk him. When he protested he was promptly handcuffed, taken to the police station and charged with resisting arrest, striking a police officer and driv-

ing without a light over his license plate.

A week later, another black dentist, Dr. Daniel J. Clairborn, was held on suspicion of drunk driving for six hours, when in fact, he had really suffered a stroke just before his arrest.

Clairborn died two weeks after his release.

These two incidents, to Chicago blacks, illustrate hundreds of alleged cases of police brutality in the Chicago neighborhoods, and not since Dr. Martin Luther King came here in the early 1960s have blacks been so angry at city officials.

The leader in venting this anger is Rep. Ralph H. Metcalfe, the former Olympic

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champion and once one of Mayor Richard Daley's most trusted black lieutenants. Dr. Odom is his close friend and congressional campaign manager.

Metcalfe was Daley's handpicked president pro-tem of the City Council, on which he served 15 years. Then in 1970, Daley tapped him to take over the seat of the late Rep. William Dawson.

Dawson's favorite phrase was, "Don't get mad, get even." In reality, he never did either.

Now Metcalfe, an active member of the congressional Black Caucus, seems to be fulfilling Dawson's slogan to the consternation of the mayor and his police superintendent, James B. Conlisk Jr.

Metcalfe, who had a reputation as "Daley's house black," at age 61 suddenly finds himself in league with some of Chicago's top black activists, including representatives of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson's operation PUSH, and numerous other anti-Daley organizations that have united to end what they consider as selective police brutality.

"I know the political realities of what I am doing," said Metcalfe, "but I am prepared to let the chips fall where they may. I'm willing to pay whatever political frankly I don't think there consequences I have to, but will be any."

The soft spoken athlete-turned-politician admits he reshaped some of his thinking when he became active in the Black Caucus, made up of several more militant congressmen; years his junior.

"In the caucus we have decided to put the interests of black people first—above all else and that means even going against our party or our political leaders if black interests don't coincide with



REP. RALPH METCALFE
... upset at "brutality"

their positions," he said.

Metcalfe denies he is feuding with Daley, but the congressman and many of his black followers boycotted a city hall meeting last week at which the administration came up with a plan to decrease tensions between blacks and police.

Metcalfe boycotted the meeting because Daley earlier had refused to meet with a Metcalfe-chaired committee on police brutality in a South Side church.

"We want him to come to our soil here the problems really are," the congressman said.

The committee has issued a list of demands upon the police department, aimed at ending police brutality. One call for a civilian review board in each police district to hear charges of brutality.

Another gives the department a May 31 deadline to end brutality.

Metcalfe's citizens' committee—and others before it—contends that policemen, particularly white officers, harass blacks by stopping them for minor traffic offenses and abusing the state's

stop and frisk law, originally opposed by blacks.

The committee also wants several special police tactical units removed from black neighborhoods. The units were deployed ostensibly to reduce crime rates, "but they have just put more police power in our neighborhoods to harass us," said Metcalfe.

The committee has also demanded that more blacks be recruited for the police force and more blacks be promoted to policy-making positions within the department. Blacks make up more than 35 per cent of Chicago's population, but the police department is only about 17 per cent black.

While white motorists are usually issued traffic tickets on the spot, many blacks are taken to police stations after being frisked on the street, the committee contends. Some squad cars follow black motorists "anxious to spot any small traffic violation," said Metcalfe. "Ironically, sometimes violations occur out of nervousness from being followed."

In addition to the Odom and Clairborn cases, the committee has documented several other instances of alleged brutality, including the experience of one black mother who was kicked and called a "nigger whore" by a white officer issuing her a traffic ticket. Her children, passengers in her car, witnessed the incident.

Another case involves the detaining of a black columnist for the Chicago Tribune because "his trunk appeared to be low," said Metcalfe.

Rumors have been circulating here that Daley may kick Conlisk upstairs and get a new police superintendent, but Metcalfe says "We won't accept a scapegoat firing as a solution to our problems. The problem is institutional, not personal."

Though Daley and Metcalfe have never been farther apart politically, Metcalfe insists, I have always told him when I thought something was wrong and we've always gotten along."

Most recently Metcalfe protested vehemently when the Daley machine re-slated State's Attorney Edward V. Hanrahan, the man whose police led a raid on a Black Panther apartment in which two persons were slain by police bullets. But Metcalfe was overruled, even though Hanrahan was later dumped by party leaders. He ran as an independent and won re-nomination despite being under indictment for obstruction justice in connection with the 1969 raid.

Some political observers here believe Metcalfe's opposition to Hanrahan's re-slating marked the end of his cozy relationship with Daley. Metcalfe disagrees, but Friday he announced he could not support Hanrahan for re-election even though the state's attorney is now the official Democratic Party nominee.

While he refused to accuse Daley of pressuring him, Metcalfe disclosed that city fire department inspectors had been looking for building violations in his ward committeemen's office.

The congressman insists his leadership in the brutality protests should come as no surprise. "I've always spoken out for my people—for what I believe but in the past I've tried to remedy situations on a case-by-case basis, trying to work within

party or official government circles.

"In the brutality field, however, I can't just stand by while each and every case is investigated. I want the system changed. If pillars of the black community like Drs. Odom and Clairborn are treated this way, what chance does the average citizen have at the hands of police?"

Somehow, Ralph Metcalfe doesn't sound like William Dawson's successor anymore.